

2

OBSERVATIONS  
ON THE  
GENERAL FAST  
OF

THE YEAR 1796.

---

BY THE  
REV. WILLIAM AGUTTER, M. A.

---

LONDON:  
PRINTED FOR F. AND C. RIVINGTON, NO. 62,  
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

M.DCC.XCVI.

*Price Two-pence each, or 25 for Three Shillings.*

*Lately published by the same Author,*  
**THE SIN OF WASTEFULNESS:**  
**A SERMON.**

*Price 6d. or 4s. 6d. a Dozen, to give away.*



---

## OBSERVATIONS, &c.

---

**E**VERY wise and pious man must see the necessity of public humiliation while suffering under public calamities; of calling upon **GOD** in the great congregation to continue our blessings or to avert our distresses. Those minds must be blinded by ignorance or degraded by impiety, which can ridicule, or insult such rational solemnities.

War, however it may commence, or succeed, yet must be considered as a sore judgment of the Almighty: it is attended with a train of evils, public and private; but the **WAR** in which we are at present engaged, is perfectly new in its kind. It is a **WAR** with men who have no interest in peace. It is a **WAR** with men, whose dark designs are to be promoted by the disturbances of surrounding nations. It is a **WAR** with men who are animated with the wildest enthusiasm against all existing

existing governments, and whose great object is to debauch the minds of the multitude in every country, by representing the restraints of religion and the exercise of civil authority, as artful contrivances to keep them in slavery. It is a WAR with men who have been prodigal of their resources, and threatened as an *overwhelming flood* to desolate all the nations of Europe.

Engaged then with such an enemy, exposed to such imminent danger, can we have confidence in our own virtues? Can we rely on the arm of flesh? Are we a nation fearing GOD and working righteousness? Can we justly expect His wisdom to guide our councils; and His power to go forth with our armies? If our enemies have drunk of the cup of trembling, can we securely hope that it will pass by us?—if they are wicked, is that any ground for our security?—if *they* have openly blasphemed and mocked the GOD of heaven, do *we* sincerely honour, and obey *the Lord who bought us*? Do not vast numbers among ourselves pass their lives without prayer, either public, private, or domestic; and are not such without GOD in the world? If *they* deny His overruling providence, and ascribe all success to their own prudence, are *we* humbly resigned to His disposal in all events?—If *they* have abolished the Christian sabbath, and have thought to *change*

*change times and seasons*, to blot out the remembrance of the Great Creator from the earth, do *we* reverence His holy sabbath, and rejoice in His sanctuary, neither devoting that day to the drudgery of business, the indulgence of sloth, or the vanity of amusements?—Why are our churches so thinly attended and almost deserted in the afternoon?—Have our enemies proclaimed death to be an eternal sleep, and do not too many among us live in such stupidity, indifference, and contempt of things serious, as if they really expected no hereafter? for they certainly make no preparation for any.—Have *they* set up the idol of their imagination, the goddess of their idolatry, human reason without revelation, changeable as the passions of men, degraded as the harlot by whom their goddess was represented: but are *we* safe from the infection of vain philosophy which exalts man while it forgets GOD; do we value and practise the eternal wisdom, the only right reason, revealed in the word of truth?—Have *they* degraded marriage as a mere civil contract, depending on passion and caprice, as easily dissolved as first formed; but do *we*, who profess better things, consider marriage as holy and good, and conscientiously fulfil the engagement of that important relation, neither allowing affection to sink into indifference, nor authority to be degraded into tyranny?—Have our enemies

rejoiced in iniquity and gloried in their injustice, cruelty, rapine, and murder, and do not too many among us inculcate the same principles, and applaud the same practice, although they have seen them attended with such misery and affliction?—Did they basely murder a mild and merciful king, whom they once insulted with the grossest adulation; and are there not miscreants among ourselves who dare to insult a king who deserves every respect and protection?

If then our *enemies* have provoked GOD and are suffering under His judgments, have *we* any good ground to hope that we shall escape? He is no respecter of persons; but the individuals or the nations who have transgressed, must suffer for their transgression. They who have planted the deadly plant must eat the bitter fruit.

We have been warned before: we have smarted under the scourge of war for some years: we have before fasted and humbled ourselves, but have we repented and amended? Have we been sincere in our declarations before GOD? Have we turned from the evil of our doings, and are we more cautious not to offend for the future? If amendment has not followed, we only fast for strife and debate; we mock GOD by honouring Him with our lips, while our hearts are far from Him.

“Bring



“Bring no more vain oblations. The calling  
“of assemblies I cannot away with; it is ini-  
“quity; even the solemn meeting.” It is  
adding hypocrisy to other crimes already too  
numerous and destructive.

As nations only exist in time, so they can  
only be punished or rewarded in time. Indi-  
viduals may look for full retribution beyond  
the grave, but this is not the case with nations.  
Thus while righteousness exalteth a nation,  
sin will be the reproach of any people, even in  
this world. Here they transgress and here they  
will be punished.

He who dwelleth on high, who frustrateth  
the counsels of men, has abundant means to  
humble a proud nation, to exhaust their vast  
resources, and to punish their vain confidence;  
for, should not the enemy prevail: should their  
fleet vanish, and their armies be unable to in-  
vade our coasts, to ravage our fields, and to ga-  
ther our harvests: yet the *winds* and the *waves*  
may fight against us and bring upon us as sure  
destruction.—Numerous armies may never  
meet with a foe, and yet be cut off by the  
*pestilence*.—At His command we are visited with  
the mildew, the blast, and the caterpillar, and  
the earth refuses to yield her increase to the la-  
bour of man. Then, our confidence becomes  
our confusion, and the riches of the state, in  
the

the number of inhabitants, become its sore burden.

The consequence has been discontents and riotings, violence and bloodshed; the wrath of man has increased the price of provisions already too high, and wantonly destroyed some when they complained of not having enough.

Does not our land mourn on account of profane swearing, of open perjury, of repeated duels, which are deliberate murder, passing unpunished; of notorious sedition and secret treason; of the want of subordination in all ranks of societies? How is the Bible shamefully neglected, the great privilege of the Protestant church, while every insipid poem, every licentious novel are read, and particularly every political pamphlet, containing the grossest falsehoods, degraded by the vilest abuse, is eagerly read and rapidly circulated.

We certainly have much to fear from the hand of Providence, from the rage of our adversaries, from the discontents of faction and sedition among ourselves, but we have more to fear from our own personal vices, from our sins unrepented of, from means of amendment continually offered and as continually neglected. We certainly are in danger, but we need not despair. "If GOD be for us," and by ardent prayer, by unfeigned humility and national amendment, we may secure Him on our side,



side, we need not fear any power of men that are against us; their violence shall become weakness, and their devices of none effect.

Great part of the benefits of the appointed Fast must depend on our previous dispositions, thoughts, and resolutions; if we look upon it only as an annual formal solemnity, a mere political institution, it will make no lasting impression, we shall derive no salutary benefit from it. Therefore, let us, from the highest to the lowest, *consider our ways*; and then *prepare to meet our GOD* in his appointed ordinance. We may secure a blessing to ourselves, and a lengthening of our tranquillity, if it be not our own fault. Yet the temporal advantages of peace, security and protection, are but comparatively small when contrasted with that eternal joy and happiness which will be the fruit of our well-doing.

Let us then live in the fear and love of GOD as the only way to secure his favour either here or hereafter.

While we condemn the enormities which our enemies have committed; their oppressions, robberies, insults, ravages, and massacres, let us pity their sufferings and pray for their forgiveness, that they may yet enjoy the blessings of peace, and rejoice in the light of the Gospel; that we may yet receive them as brethren, not in the false name imposed by

poli-

political delusion, but in the real bonds of christian charity.

As wise and good men, let us reverence and support that government under which we live, and respect those laws which are made for the advantage of all, while they are particularly directed with just severity against the lawless, the disobedient, the factious, and the violent; yet they cannot give a good man any uneasiness, for he certainly never intends to disobey them.

Let us not listen to the voice of discontent, magnifying the evils of our imperfect condition here; and let us particularly be cautioned not to enter the cabals of sedition, lest we should not discover the extent of our danger until we become too deeply involved in the guilt of others.

If we suffer as a nation, through lack of bread, let us consider it as an affliction of Providence, and not indulge repining against man; be not tempted to commit robbery and wrong, under a vain pretence of reducing the price of provision, for these means immediately raise the necessaries of life and destroy the national stock already too small; but let us receive this scarcity in the meekness of wisdom, as a just punishment for repeated mercies unthankfully received, for our luxury and intemperance.

Let

We have seen a great and splendid system of superstition so totally overthrown, that there does not remain one stone upon another. Hence we learn, that a vast revenue and a numerous priesthood, in vain attempt to support a kingdom, or a church, when the vital principle is wanting: *wherever the carcass is, thither will the eagles be gathered together. The axe is laid to the root of the tree:* no vain pretensions, or outward ceremonies will avail when we are called on to *worship the Father in spirit and in truth.*

When we observe the convulsions of empires, the destructions of monarchies, and every species of property greatly endangered, how forcibly are we taught *not to love the world*, not to seek our happiness from the creature, or to fix our rest on this changing scene!

Let then the ensuing Fast be distinguished and blessed as the beginning of national reformation. Are we servants? let us be honest, diligent, sober and faithful in our stations—Are we masters? let us be mild, considerate and humane to those beneath us—Are we children? let us be obedient, affectionate and respectful to our parents—Are we parents? let us exercise authority with mildness, neither weakened by levity, nor imposed with harshness—Are we engaged in trade? let us  
not

not make haste to be rich by means of delusive speculations, lest we should involve ourselves and others in the deepest distress.

O nation, highly favoured and greatly beloved, despise not these warnings of Heaven; reject not the means of thy safety! *Humble thyself under the mighty hand of GOD* when he punishes. Beware lest ye despise his threatenings and increase his indignation. Can a greater calamity befall us than blindness of heart, by which we either do not see the judgments of GOD, or do not endeavour to escape them? Let us return by sincere repentance unto that heavenly Father whom we have long forsaken: Let us call upon *Him who is mighty to save*, with the voice of earnest prayer, and *He will save us* from the rage of our enemies, from the dominion of our vices, and the consequences of our sins: He will again bless us with plenty, and secure us in peace: and yet his temporal mercies are only so many types and assurances of his eternal loving-kindness; if we are not greatly wanting to ourselves, He will deliver us from the hands of our spiritual enemies, and save us with an everlasting salvation. *Therefore, wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings. Cease to do evil: learn to do well. Let the wicked forsake his ways and the unrighteous man his paths.*

F I N I S.

